

# **Michigan Bear Hunters Association**

6/23/09 Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 483  
House Committee on Tourism, Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resources

Good morning. I'm Bill Walker, and I live in Bloomfield Hills. I'm a member of the board of directors of the Michigan Bear Hunters Association and am here to testify on behalf of my organization, the Michigan Hunting Dog Federation, the Upper Peninsula Bear Houndsmen Association and the Michigan State United Coon Hunters Association.

All of us support Senate Bill 483, which passed the Senate Thursday. Due to your speedy hearing, which we really appreciate, these other groups were unable to send a representative on short notice.

Our association, the Michigan Bear Hunters Association, is a statewide group, founded in 1946, and we have worked hard over our life to try to assure the well-being of the bear, bobcat, coyote and wolf.

Senate Bill 483 cures a perversion of the intent of House Bill 5331, which last year passed this committee and was signed into law.

The bill essentially eliminated the hunting license requirement for those who go along on a bear or bobcat hunt with dogs and carry no weapons. For background, I've attached my testimony from last December's Senate hearing on the rationale for House Bill 5331.

In a letter of this April 2, which I've also attached to my testimony, six legislators, including Chairman Sheltrown, asked the state Natural Resources Commission to ensure the intent of House Bill 5331 was correctly implemented by the state Department of Natural Resources.

Regarding dogs, the April letter said that the intent was "to require only the owner of the dogs or a person who has borrowed the owner's dogs and taken them to the field to have a hunting license." Persons who only handle dogs in the field were intended to be exempt from the license requirement.

In meetings this spring, attended by the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, the Michigan Hunting Dog Federation, our association, the DNR Law Enforcement Division chief and other DNR staff, it became clear - even after the April letter was written - that the DNR would persist in requiring dog handlers have a hunting license.

As a matter of fact, the new DNR 2009 Michigan Bear Hunting Guide, written after the April letter, states that an "individual in possession of any dog chasing or locating bear on a hunt" requires a license. We imagine it's in anticipation of this legislation you're hearing today that the guide goes on to say, "These regulations are under review and subject to change."

Senate Bill 483 makes a simple change. It strikes the two words, "or possess," in the three places it now occurs in the law. Its effect is to limit the license requirement to just the dogs' owner. We realize this change exempts the infrequent dog-borrower from the

requirement, but the benefit is that the change eliminates all opportunity for misapplication of the language.

By the way, in no other dog-hunting sports does the DNR specify that dog owners, dog borrowers or dog handlers be required to have a license: not coyote hunting, where these very same bear dogs are used; not raccoon hunting; not rabbit hunting; not pheasant hunting, nor any bird hunting; none.

In closing, I'd like to say how much we've appreciated the Legislature's overwhelming support of the original bill, and Chairman Sheltroun's and Reps. Elsenheimer's and Wayne Schmidt's efforts on the House side to correct this problem.

If we're fortunate enough to have the full Legislature and the governor agree with us, we hope this bill might become law before the opening of this bear season, Sept. 10.

Thank you. May I answer any questions?

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Thursday, April 02, 2009

Department of Natural Resources  
Attention: Natural Resource Commission  
P.O. BOX 30028  
Lansing, MI 48909

Members of the Natural Resource Commission:

We are writing to you today to ensure the intent of House Bill 5331 is correctly implemented by the state Department of Natural Resources.

The legislative intent of this bill is to require only the owner of the dogs or a person who has borrowed the owner's dogs and taken them to the field to have a hunting license. The intent is to exempt persons who physically handle dogs in the field from requiring a hunting license.

We would encourage you to look into this matter to ensure the legislative intent of the bill is carried out by the respected department. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding the intent of HB 5331, please do not hesitate to contact our offices.

Sincerely,

Sen. Jason Allen  
District 37

Sen. Jim Barcia  
District 31

Sen. Michelle McManus  
District 35

Rep. Kevin Elsenheimer  
District 105

Rep. Wayne Schmidt  
District 104

Rep. Joel Sheltrown  
District 103

## Michigan Bear Hunters Association

12/2/08 Testimony in Support of House Bill 5331  
Senate Committee on Hunting, Fishing and Outdoor Recreation

Good afternoon. My name is Bill Walker. I live in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. I'm a member of the board of directors of the Michigan Bear Hunters Association, and I'm here to testify on behalf of my organization in support of House Bill 5331, whose primary sponsor is Rep. Howard Walker.

Our association is a statewide group, founded in 1946, and we have worked hard over our life to try to assure the well-being of the bear, bobcat, coyote and wolf.

House Bill 5331 essentially does away with a needless and unfair licensing regulation. The regulation does nothing to protect game animals. It brings in virtually no revenue. It hurts hunter recruitment. And it harms relations between hunters and the state Department of Natural Resources.

Please let me explain.

The regulation we're attempting to eliminate says on a bear or bobcat hunt with dogs, not only do the armed persons who are trying to take the animal need a license, but so do others who are along on the hunt.

Ironically, it was our association who persuaded the state Natural Resources Commission back in 1987 to create the participation license. We did it to protect bears.

Back then, the bear kill was uncapped. The limited license, or permit, system we have in force today did not exist. Large groups of out-of-state houndmen were hunting the Upper Peninsula for the entire 52-day season. Licenses were unlimited; they could be bought over the counter.

Because nonresident bear licenses were and are expensive (in 1986, a license cost \$150.25), all members of these large groups would hunt off just one or two licenses. As they bagged bears, they would buy additional licenses to keep at least one unfilled license in the group. We told the NRC these groups were hurting bear numbers, and the NRC agreed.

The 1987 participation license requirement forced everyone in the group to buy a \$150 license before the hunt. That was the end of the large out-of-state, season-long groups.

But when the statewide bear permit system was created in 1990, it negated any need for participation licenses. License quotas were now set for each bear management unit, which capped the number of hunters and thus controlled the harvest.

So, the participation license, this year renamed the no kill tag, no longer protects bears.

And it raises almost no money. According to the DNR, sales of these licenses generated \$40,000 a year, a little over one hundredth of one percent (that's one percent of one percent) of the agency's annual budget.